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Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel Holds Hearing on Reserve Component Programs of the Defense Department

LIST OF PANEL MEMBERS AND WITNESSES

NELSON:

The subcommittee meets today to discuss reserve component programs and I welcome back my partner and good friend on the subcommittee, Senator Graham.

GRAHAM:

Yes, sir.

NELSON:

We've worked together either as ranking member or chairman for a number of years. It's always good to (inaudible).

GRAHAM:

Thank you, sir.

NELSON:

Lindsey, and your support and your encouragement.

To our witnesses, welcome. On the panel we welcome back Mr. Thomas Hall, the assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, who is also serving as the acting

undersecretary for personnel and readiness.

Mr. Hall has been the assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs since October of 2002 and has been Secretary Gates' (inaudible) on the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves.

And I understand the secretary will leave government service next month after completing more than 40 years of fine military and federal civilian service. Secretary Hall and your wife, we're delighted to have you here today and we're looking forward to your testimony even one last time before you depart. We want to especially thank you for the past seven years for your tireless and dedicated service as assistant secretary for reserve affairs.

We're eager to hear your views of the recommendations of the commission on the National Guard and Reserves and look forward to hearing your insights and recommendations based on your vast experience with our reserve components.

On our second panel we have the directors of the Army and Air Force National Guard and chiefs of the reserve components. I'll introduce each of them when we convene this panel.

The reserve components have undergone a significant transformation in the past eight years from a core area strategic force to an operational force. Manned and equipped to face both the traditional (inaudible) threats of the 21st century. Despite the evolving operational nature of the reserve components there remains a strategic quality.

The reserve components respond to unforeseen events with a greater mobilization than the active duty provide. Our reserve components engaged in all fronts of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we know that our efforts in Afghanistan will not be successful by military force along, but must also include a (inaudible) strategy for diplomacy and economic development and sustainability.

The 28th Forward Agribusiness development team deployed from Nebraska to Afghanistan is illustrative of an engagement strategy that promotes diplomacy and economic development.

Our 52-unit team from Nebraska is in Afghanistan to assist, teach, train and educate farmers on better farming methods, and to introduce the farmers to better and more sustainable crops to promote the eradication of the poppy trade.

Best said by the agricultural team, chief of the unit, Army First Lieutenant Eric Saddleburg (ph) to the National Guard Bureau, quote, "Our goal in every mission is to

improve relations with the locals. This type of mission will strengthen the bond between Afghanistan and the U.S. because they know that we're here to help grow this nation, rather than destroy it," end of quote.

This Nebraska unit is but one example of how the Guard and Reserve have transformed from a strategic reserve to an operational force. Our reserve forces have risen to meet the new and constant challenges, but we must continue to monitor and assess this evolution to ensure that it is funded, manned, equipped and trained so that it is ready and able to meet its missions while retaining the character and essence of the citizen soldier.

And as we enter the ninth year of sustained combat, the stress on our all-volunteer force, active and reserve, is greater than ever. Last week, we heard from the vice chiefs of the services about the rising incidence of suicides, particularly in the Army and Marine Corps. Both General Chiarelli and General Amos pointed to the stress on the force, lengthy and repeated deployment as a primary factor in the rise of suicides.

The force as a whole is stressed and is now manifesting itself more than ever in the health and well-being of individual service members and their families. Key to lessening the stress in the force is ensuring that we adhere to deployment and dwell-time standards.

The stated goal of the department for reserve component members is one year of mobilized service with five years dwell-time at home. This is absolutely vital to the long-term health of the Reserves and reserve component personnel.

It insures that our reservists and guardsmen remain trained and proficient while providing predictability for their families and civilian employers. This predictability and transparency goes far in sustaining the morale and mental health of our service members and allows them to plan both their military and civilian careers. It's good for the service members, their families, the military, the civilian sector and the nation.

We also learned last week that Secretary Gates has approved a plan to transition the Army off its use of stop-loss to keep military personnel on active duty after they complete their active duty service commitment.

The reserve components are scheduled to cease the use of stop-loss this summer. We applaud this move. It enhances the predictability and transparency that reservists and guardsmen and their families need to plan their careers and care for their families.

This policy decision, of course, raises a number of issues. Stop-loss has been a tool the Army used to ensure unit cohesion for units deployed or preparing to deploy. Will ending stop-loss require additional end-strength to compensate for service members who do not have enough time left on their commitment to complete a deployment?

Will National Guard and Reserve units have to rely on more cross level, cross-leveling to replace personnel who will not have enough time to complete the deployment? Does Congress need to authorize additional compensation authorities to incentivize short-term extensions?

This subcommittee stands ready to act if necessary. Ever mindful of the quality of life and quality of service of the reserve components, this committee has sponsored and supported many initiatives in recent years to address the well-being of reservists, guardsmen and their families.

Senator Graham and I will soon introduce legislation that will make health benefits under TRICARE a standard available to gray-area retirees and their families. Currently these National Guard and Reserve retirees are not eligible for TRICARE until they reach age 60.

I'll also re-introduce legislation that will encourage and demand thoughtful planning of training missions away from home for members of the reserve component known as Operation Airlift. This legislation will provide that if a reserve component member is sent to training, and then that training is suspended for more than five days, the military will pay for the travel expenses to return that member home.

The Yellow Ribbon program has been a resounding success. As General Chiarelli testified in last week's hearing, the Yellow Ribbon program has helped reserve component members and their families to transition from active duty back to civilian life.

In 2007, Congress authorized TRICARE Reserve Select which extended the military health care program, TRICARE, to members of the selected Reserve and their families. Senator Graham and I will soon introduce legislation that will enhance this program by extending TRICARE Reserve Select to gray-area retirees.

In 2006, Congress authorized income replacement for reserve component members subject to extended and frequent active duty service. In the recently passed Omnibus Appropriations Act, we enhanced this benefit, fully covering federal employees who experience an income loss due to active duty service.

In 2008, we authorized transportation allowances for certain reservists on inactive duty for training that's forced to travel long distances. Also in 2008, Congress enacted the new GI bill, complete with transferability to spouses or children. Given the vastly increased mobilizations of reservists and guardsmen, many will be eligible for these generous benefits under the new GI bill, even a fully-funded college education.

Lastly, as I indicated earlier, we've supported an end to the Army's practice of stop-loss and support compensation to service members who served under stop-loss.

We will continue to look for opportunities to enhance benefits that are prudent and needed to maintain a healthy force. One positive effect of the lagging economy seems to be that military recruiting and retention is up. With a friendlier recruiting environment, we expect that the quality of new recruits will be even better. We look forward to hearing today about the recruiting and retention successes of the reserve components.

I also look forward to hearing about the effect of the new GI bill and transferability on both recruiting and retention in the reserve components.

Senator Graham, would you like to make an opening statement?

GRAHAM:

Very briefly, Mr. Chairman.

One, I'd like to echo what you started off with, the idea that we do work well together. Our staffs are -- have done a terrific job. There's a lot of conflict in the Congress and between the parties, and that's a, you know, just the way democracy works.

But when it comes to this subcommittee and generally speaking the Armed Services Committee in general, we do a very good job, I think, of working together because our men and women in uniform are not partisans. They're patriots, and what we try to do is make sure that our patriotic nature overcomes our partisanship.

And you have been a very, very good chairman and I've enjoyed working with you, and I think as you've just indicated we've done some pretty good things. And there's more to come. We're going to work on maybe trying to allow early retirement for people who volunteer for deployments. We have a program in place, but I think we could even be more aggressive.

But Secretary Hall, I just want to echo what Senator Nelson said, our chairman. You have done a great job for the country for a very long period of time. I'm glad your wife is here today. She is, I'm sure, been a great partner here and we can't thank you enough. You've had a very tough assignment. It's been six-and-a-half years of constant combat. And to our Reserve members and the commanders, like Senator Nelson I've been to Iraq and Afghanistan many, many times and you can't tell the difference between a reservist and active duty member.

And the missions that the Reserves have performed have been absolutely essential to the outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Civil affairs component and military police; you can go down the list. The Guard and Reserve has not only stepped up to fill in, but they've been the leading agencies, components on a lot of things that are necessary to win this war that we're in.

So the best testament I can give to a member of the Guard and Reserves is that when you go to war no one can tell the difference between you and your active duty counterpart. And to those who will be -- maybe this will be your last time. I don't know. We may call you back to our Army National Guard.

Lieutenant General Vaughn, thank you for your service.

The commander of the Marine forces, Lieutenant General Bergman, thank you very much for what you all have done and if this is your last time, well done; if you come back again, welcome. So who knows what the future holds.

But I'll look forward to listening to the state of play of the Guard and Reserves and thank you all for your service and Mr. Chairman, we'll continue to work together for the good of the country.

NELSON:

Thank you very much, Senator Graham.

Well, we'll now hear from our first witness, Mr. Hall. Thank you.

HALL:

Thank you. I would like my written statement entered into the record.

NELSON:

So ordered.

HALL:

And I have a brief statement. First, to thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Graham for

what you have done. You've always been very gracious to us and no two people have supported our Guard and Reserve more, and in that I'd like to start out by congratulating Congress.

You often get all the blame, but it's perhaps not known in the past six-and-a-half years over 200 -- 200 provisions in the law regarding the Guard and Reserve have been made, and many of those at your support and your insistence, and so we thank you for that.

And as was mentioned, over 50 years ago I put on the uniform of this country. And I've had the opportunity in different capacities to serve our nation. It's all I've ever known. I've lived the dream for that amount of time. One of the reasons I asked my wife to come because for 46 years she has devoted her life to supporting the families and the troops and deserves more recognition than I do.

She came to my confirmation hearing and she's coming to what I hope is the last hearing, but perhaps -- and we want to thank you.

And the gentleman behind me, I know when it's their turn, they will give you their honest opinion and there has just never been a better group of Guard and Reserve chiefs, and I say that having been one because they are a superb group and dedicated Americans.

We've had the largest mobilization since World War II. You know that. Today we passed over the statistics. I saw 700,000 guardsmen and reservists have been mobilized since 9/11. There are 127,000 on duty today serving throughout the world.

And I also think that our boss, Secretary Gates, has made some fundamental changes which have been very critical. The 19 January memo that you mentioned, I think, was a real watershed where he said that the mobilization time will be one year for our Guard and Reserve.

And that we will have goals of one-in-two for our active duty, one-in-five for our Guard and Reserve. And I can report in the two years since then, and I track these every week, we've gone from about 1.28 to 1.30 to now the last group that we are planning, the last group that we're going to take for mobilization, are at one in four.

So we are, within about a year we've increased a full year. Part of that has been our ability to increase the size of the Army, the Marine Corps. Part of that has been rebalancing. We have rebalanced about 125,000 billets. We have plans for 225,000 from our less- stressed career groups over to our more-stressed. That has helped us get there.

We have published the operational reserve directive. One of the recommendations of the Commission on the Guard and Reserves is we need to institutionalize this. We need to

make it a way of practice. And in October we published that directive and we're proceeding along that line.

And in there, we talk about how we are going to mobilize, how we're going to recruit, utilize our Guard and Reserve.

On recruiting, this is the best recruiting statistic that I've seen in six-and-a-half years. As of today, these gentleman combined are recruiting at 111 percent -- 111 percent. I have never seen that.

Our quality, we are at 94 percent high school graduates. We have a goal of 90 percent, and as you know in this country, I think that it's a tragedy that high school graduates are down around 70 percent. We're at 94 percent.

For our categories one through three, our goal is 60 percent. We're at 67 percent. And most importantly, in category four we have a goal of no more than 3 percent. We're at only 1 percent. Now, the economy helps, but I say these are great patriots today and these young men and women are serving because they are patriots. It's not just the economy.

We have made great progress in equipping our Guard and Reserve. When I've appeared before this committee and others, we've talked about it. Over \$50 billion in the program of record is going toward our Guard and Reserve, and \$30 billion of that is towards the National Guard. I think one of our challenges will be to sustain that because that's in the program of record, but we need to sustain it.

There are \$10 billion that are in this year's program of equipment towards our Guard and Reserve, and if we execute that that will bring the Guard up to about 78 percent of their equipment on hand. We've never been above 70 and it's been cascaded old equipment. This will be brand new compatible equipment. So we and also I think the committee needs to watch and make sure that we execute that.

One of the recommendations of the Commission on the Guard and Reserve is to provide a mechanism by which we track finally how we program, execute the appropriations for the Guard and Reserves. We have just signed out to number 42 and 43 in the Commission's Report a mechanism for how we are going to do that.

Every quarter it will be required that the services report to my office how they're using equipment, where it is, and where it's going. Twice a year, although it's not required, we're going to report to you on the appropriations that you made, how we're tracking that equipment so we will all know that it's ending up with the Guard and Reserve. So we'll be doing that.

Again, a large effort we've had in supporting our families and our employers. You mentioned the Yellow Ribbon program. That comes under my office. We have established the Yellow Ribbon program, the Center of Excellence. We have manned that with representatives from each one of our components from the V.A.

We've moved that office into the Pentagon in my spaces. On Monday, we will hold the first advisory board meeting of the Yellow Ribbon program. We have about \$200 million in this year in execution that we are putting towards that program.

We have institutionalized the 30- and 60- and 90-day reintegration effort, because we know that we need to get those people and their families back, because families notice something wrong sometimes before the trooper will admit it. So getting them back at that periodicity will help us talk to them. We're going to be doing that.

With the stop-loss, I'm proud to say that the Army Reserve on September 1 will end that, the Army Guard after that. I do not think, and I would be interested in what my colleagues have to say, that that will cause a lot of difference in cross-leveling and with the IRR. We've mobilized about 20,000 of the IRR since 9/11.

In Gulf War I, we used 30,000. We have 225,000, so we've not at all approached that, but we need to watch that very carefully and I think with proper manning of stop-loss, you hit upon something which I think we would welcome. We need to incentivize people to extend their time and that's going to require some dollars.

So after the budget comes over, I know my colleagues won't be bashful at that time, but if they need money for incentivization for people to extend, I think we will be able to do that without tapping the IRR too much, but you mentioned that.

TRICARE Reserve Select, that's been something which you all have driven. I'm happy to report that 100,000 of our people are taking advantage of that. The premiums are very attractive. I'm not a health insurance person, but they tell me those premiums of \$78 for a single person is pretty competitive.

So, 100,000 have already taken advantage. That's growing along the way and so we appreciate that. And I imagine there wouldn't be a gray-area retiree to resist the fact that if you all pass that law.

I think I'll end there and be happy to answer any of your questions.

Thank you.

NELSON:

Senator Thune, Senator Chambliss, any opening remarks?

CHAMBLISS:

I do just want to thank Tom for his great service. He's had six-and-a-half great years at the Pentagon. Tom, you've done a great job. You've provided great service to our country and we thank you for that.

HALL:

Thank you for heading that caucus, and I appreciate being with you the other day. I appreciate all your support.

NELSON:

Secretary Hall, I know that you led that working group of the senior executives that were directed to conduct this comprehensive review, the report of the Commission of the National Guard and Reserves. What's the status of the department's implementation of the recommendations of the commission?

And perhaps you can outline the three most difficult issues that your working group had to address. And finally, what did your working group make with respect to making a concept of a continuum of service to reality?

Starting first with what's the status, and then what three challenges did you notice.

HALL:

We set a very aggressive timeline. The commission met for about two-and-a-half years, and I was determined in two-and-a-half months to complete our staffing and we did that. It took a very large whip, but we accomplished that.

With the recommendations, number 42 and 43 were the last two on equipment and programming. That completes the implementation of what the secretary directed. He directed the implementation of 82 of the 95 recommendations. Two of them were sent to V.A. The other 11 required no action or did not agree with. So all of those 82 are in the

process of being implemented.

My office is charged with reporting monthly, and the first report will be next month on the status of each one of those. We have a timeline for each of them. We're going to follow them and one of the things that I want to do is not to die and become another report that goes on the shelf. So we're required to report directly to the secretary every month on those.

The hardest ones? I think the equipment and the programming was very difficult because the services did not want to reduce their flexibility in how they handle the equipment. But at the same time we needed visibility. So to obtain something which would give us flexibility and visibility together, we hammered for quite some time. That's been decided.

I think the joint qualifications for our people were very important, and I know Senator Graham was very familiar with this, and we have now worked out in October of 2007, the joint military qualifications are now extended to all the Guard and Reserve, and most importantly it's not just a quantity of time you serve. It's quality of time. If you serve six months in a combat zone, that might be more quality joint time than two years on a staff.

So we have the provisions for that. It's fully integrated and I also mentioned that for our tags (ph). We went out with a call to the tags (ph) to see what ones thought that they would qualify for joint credit within their state and 29 of them came in and set those qualifications. The joint staff approved all 29 -- 29 of 29 for those tags (ph) would be joint duty credit for their service as a tag (ph) within the state where they have both the Army and the Air Force.

So I think those were some of the most challenging ones. Also support to civil authorities and of course, the others have already been accomplished with General McKinley pinning on the fourth star and General Blum being the first deputy commander, so those we implemented already. But those were the bit more challenging ones, but I think we're on track with that, senator.

NELSON:

The commission determined that reserve component personnel are called to serve in 29 different statuses. It concluded that these statuses are confusing and frustrating to both the members and the commanders. And so the commission recommended that DOD reduce the number of duty statuses from 29 to 2, and that's a substantial reduction. What's the department's assessment of this recommendation?

HALL:

They once tried to teach me all 29 as an aviator, but they found that that impossible for me to remember it. The answer is not two and the answer is not 29. And I commanded the Naval Reserve along the way and experienced all of those, and so we're trying to do something unique this time. We're actually trying to turn it over to the operators. These gentlemen back here who use it, and say what amount of those do you think gives you the most flexibility in what you need?

I think it's going to be between four to seven, because that flexibility, but rather than us decide it in OSD and in the Pentagon, I've asked them to tell us what you need and then we ought to listen to them and we ought to put those four to six in. That's working right now. They're doing that, and I anticipate the answer, whatever they give, we will implement those for both flexibility and what they need.

NELSON:

Thank you. And finally, the commission made a number of recommendations to improve the health care benefit available to the reserve component members and their families. Has the department taken any action or will it take any action to improve that health care? We're introducing legislation, but is there anything that's under way right now?

HALL:

Well, I think that TRICARE Reserve Select has just been a watershed, because when I first came into the job it was predicted that we would never have a military health care system available to all drilling reservists and their families when you come on active duty. But you fixed that, and so I think that, and as I mentioned, 100,000, and that can't but help us with the overall health of our families and our troops.

I have been very encouraged in dental readiness, as a for instance, and you all each time have asked me about that, and I think you should ask my colleagues about it. When I first went to stations at Fort Bliss, Fort Hood, the various places, the dental readiness of our units, the BCTs, was running about 30 percent.

When I visited with General Wyatt's 45th when he was a tag (ph) in Oklahoma, it was about 90 percent. And the use of commercial vans that he used and they pioneered, where they pull a van up to a drill center and as I'd say, they'd "drill them while they're on drill."

And they have three seats and you run them through one end and you take care of all of them and you do that before they mobilize and you do that at the armory, so when they report to the MOB station, you don't take time away from training. They are already ready.

Now, we're not 90 percent in every unit, but what I'm saying is the percentage is going up to 75 to 80 to 90, so we're well on the way to that. And so I think the medical readiness of the troops and their families because of what you have done. Can we improve some more? There's some more improvements on the margin with the TRICARE, you mentioned for gray area. But I think for our troops and their use of the system, 90 days prior to going to mobilization, six months afterwards. You can for every 90 days that you serve up to a year, so you could have it for eight years after mobilization.

Combined with being able to have it any time, I think is the right way forward, because if we're going to use 700,000 guardsmen and reservists, we've got to have the same medical standards for them as the active duty. And we're along that way. We're not perfect, but great progress has been made in that area.

NELSON:

Thank you. That's great.

Senator Graham?

GRAHAM:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, one thing that's intrigued me is that due to the extensive deployments and redeployments and the utilization of the Guard and Reserve, the one thing that I've been worried about is people punching out at 20 that normally, you know, in my old guard unit in South Carolina, you had to blow people out. I mean, they'd stay there until they were 90 if you'd let them because they loved the unit and loved what they do. Have you seen any increase in people retiring at 20 and not staying past 30?

HALL:

I think my colleagues would be better prepared to answer that, but I think you've hit on a very important point. The way we work our recruiting, our retention, and I was a

retention officer once, is we sort of get people retained to 10 years, and at that point they're sort of in the active force and we keep them. We do very little for people past 20 years.

Now the GI bill is one of the things that is going to help with transferability and others. I personally think we need to look at what we do for people past 20 years, and I think the moving of the retirement benefits from 30 to 40 years where you can continue to accrue it is a good step forward. But we want to reenlist those people, and I often ask after 20, well, we don't have the bonuses.

So I think if we can do things to incentivize people to stay longer, rather than leave earlier, that has to be our next step, because those are the sergeants, those are the chief petty officers, those are the kinds of mid-grade officers that you need to keep and your company doesn't need to lose them at the 20-year point. So I think we all need to explore what we could propose or what you might want for that past 20.

GRAHAM:

Well, one of the things that I've been thinking about for a while was if you'll serve 22 years, you can maybe retire at 50, you know, step down the retirement, because, really, that's when you're in your military prime. You know, that 20 year person has been there and done a lot and great teachers and have a lot of skills that we will need.

So, we will look forward to working everybody to try to find a way to make sure that we keep people past 20, particularly in selected key areas.

You talked about the dental situation. And one of the things we learned after 9/11 is that when we started calling people up to active duty that we had a hard time getting Guard and reservists in deployable status because of medical problems.

And, you know, they were trained to fill in for the "fill the gap" and all of a sudden here we are in a global war on terror as I'm going to continue to call it -- you can call it what you want, but that's what I'm going to call it because I think that's what it is -- and we had a hard time getting people.

About 25 percent of the force, I think, called up to active duty was medically disqualified for dental problems initially. And when you think about, the enemy is depleting our forces without firing a shot.

And I know you've done some good things in that area, but here's a number they've given me in the book. I don't know if it's right or not. In the first quarter of fiscal year

2009, more than half of the Army Guard and Reserve, 52 percent, reported as non-deployable due to class three or four dental readiness status.

HALL:

I think me and my colleagues can that. A lot of that in that readiness area might be because they haven't had the exams and also would have to break that down to whether if you haven't had the exam, if you had treatment. When I first came into this job, the first place I visited was Fort Bragg, and a dentist came up and said, "What do you think the record is for me pulling teeth?"

GRAHAM:

The bad teeth are doing more damage to us than the enemy in many ways.

HALL:

Well, the dentists say if you can't bite you can't fight.

GRAHAM:

OK.

HALL:

So that's their fight song along the way. But this dentist pulled 28 of the 32 teeth, a person who came in was in such poor shape, because it's a problem in our country.

GRAHAM:

Well, we don't have private sector dental health care usually. The Army is just inheriting a problem that society has.

HALL:

I think we're getting better, but I think they can comment on how much better we are than...

GRAHAM:

Anything you can think of to deal with this problem and you need money and legal changes, we stand ready to help.

HALL:

Yes, sir.

GRAHAM:

Thank you for the job you've done for the country and I think you can leave your post looking back and saying that you were there when it mattered the most maybe since World War II for sure. And you're a great leader. Thank you very much.

HALL:

Thank you, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you, Senator Graham.

Senator Begich?

BEGICH:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I do have to depart, but I have just one question and it's all kind of to your question in regards to TRICARE and how it works.

I'm just going to read a note here I have. The Commission on the National Guard and

Reserve recommended that the reserve component be allowed to enroll into the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program in lieu of TRICARE, and that the department offer a stipend to members who want to retain their family in their private or employer-sponsored health plan in lieu of using TRICARE for active duty for greater than 30 days. Do you have a comment on that?

NELSON:

One of our work groups, and the chairman asked about that earlier, the status, and one of our particular work groups is looking at that proposal right now. And I think the key for the Federal Healthcare Benefit Program is what best advantages the individual. And the way I would look at it, if it's better for them to do that, they ought to have the option.

We're looking at both of those. We have to report out to the secretary on what we think about those two particular portions of that in that work group, and our first report on our progress will be next month.

BEGICH:

And I'm assuming, Mr. Chairman, you would you share that with this committee?

HALL:

Yes. We -- certainly the progress. We shared the large report with the staff and we will share progress reports with them.

BEGICH:

That would be great. Thank you. That's all, Mr. Chairman. I had just that one question for you, sir.

HALL:

Thank you sir.

NELSON:

Senator Chambliss?

CHAMBLISS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, Mr. Secretary, let me just commend you for your great service to our country. Talk for a minute if you will about the readiness and about the predictability on both sides -- the predictability from the standpoint of individual members as reservists and guardsmen and -women being able to tell their families when they're going to go. And on the other side, are we doing what we need to do from an employer standpoint to try to give the employer the predictability that they need?

HALL:

I think the single most important thing to a trooper, their family and their employers is not any different than it was when I first joined a long time ago and Barbara wanted to know when are you going to go, how long you going to stay there, when are you going to be back, and can you tell me as far ahead.

It hasn't changed a lot, and I think this was a primary certainly motivation of Secretary Gates in establishing the predictability goals, and as I say we're up to about a one in four. But more importantly is the alert of the Guard and Reserve. When I first came into the job, we were giving people 30 days notice, I mean, we were more in a crisis mode.

Then we worked -- the last groups that we were going to alert, we gave them two years notice, 20 to 24 months notice. Now one of the things I heard is if you alert them that far ahead, people will leave the units, but I don't think that's true. I think they have stayed.

So the employers, to a person, that I've spent time with have said predictability, tell us that far ahead. If you can tell us two years ahead, we will plan. And there has not been a huge exodus in my tracking of our Guard and Reserve units, and I've tracked the BCTs carefully. They have lost some, but it hasn't occurred, so I think the predictability.

When I came into the job, our ESGR, employer support of the Guard and Reserve, was funded at about \$9 million. We were reaching a small segment of our employers. Today, we're funding it at \$20 million. It doesn't sound like a lot, but we've doubled almost two-and-a-half. We want to reach more of the employers out there because the reservist has the three-legged stool: the employer, the family and their job. And if any of those legs fall off, the stool collapses. So I think predictability is probably the most important thing I hear

from families and employers.

We're working hard with ESGR. We're giving longer notifications, more alert time and I think it's been received -- yes, some people might leave if they learn two years ahead, but there hasn't been that exodus. These are very, very patriotic people that are proud to be in the units, and in the Guard in the state in particular, that's their unit. That's the people they work with. That's who they live. You all know that, and they stay with them.

So that's about where we are on our predictability. I think we ought to continue. As you know, one of the rules that was passed by Congress, you will not have less than 30 days. The goal is 90 days before you tell anyone to mobilize.

SecDef said, "No, it's 180 days." So he has told us that we have to personally report to him if we are mobilizing anybody and he took it a step from 90 to 180 days, and every week I have to report that if anybody is not given at least that much time prior to mobilization. So I think there's great sensitivity on his part and on down to the predictability.

CHAMBLISS:

OK. The 48th Brigade of the Army Guard from Georgia is heading to Afghanistan beginning in May. They did a tour in Iraq a couple of years ago. They did not get to take advantage under current law with respect to our early retirement provision, but now when they go back this time, that early retirement provision is going to kick in for them.

Senator Kerry and I have a bill up again to make it retroactive to September 11. We're going to keep working until we get that done.

What kind of anecdotal feedback have you gotten from the Guard and Reserve folks from around the country with respect to their feeling about the opportunity to retire earlier than age 60?

HALL:

It was the number one thing I got when I went to town halls, maybe tied with health care, TRICARE. But as Barbara and I travelled around the country, and she would go with me at my expense to talk with the families, every one of them mentioned those and early retirement. They applauded it.

I think, again, it's my last hearing, I'll be quite honest, I don't think you would find one

of them that would be against it being retroactive. From the department's aspect, we'll carry out the law as it is passed, but most of them have voiced that opinion to me as I've gone around and it was very important to them. They welcomed that.

They realized that as they go and serve now with the 48th, they will be able to take advantage of that. You set a minimum on it I think of 50 is what you wanted the minimum age, but could reduce it all the way down. And universally at my town halls, that's been applauded by the Guard and Reserve and your constituents. I've found no one against it.

CHAMBLISS:

Great. Well, again, thanks for your service and we know this is a family commitment. Miss Barbara, we thank you for serving your country too with respect to serving Tom. So thanks very much, Mr. Secretary.

HALL:

Thank you, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you, Senator Chambliss.

Senator Burriss, I might, before you start, a vote started at 3:05 and if you'd like to go with your questions now, and then we can break so that nobody misses a vote, then we'll come back.

BURRIS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mine will be rather quick because it's not that involved.

Welcome, Secretary Hall. I'm told this is your last tour

HALL:

Yes, sir.

BURRIS:

Well, God bless you and God speed.

HALL:

Thank you, sir.

BURRIS:

Secretary Hall, I'm especially interested in the concept of transforming from strategic reserve forces to operational reserve forces. In your statement for the record, you said that there were recommendations made by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserve that called for a complete reorganization of the categories under which the Reserve components were managed. And the commission recommended an operational category and a strategic category.

So Secretary Hall, can you tell us why no action was taken on those recommendations?

HALL:

We looked at that carefully, and I came and we came to the conclusion that it was just a different way of racking and stacking, as they say in the Army, I guess, of the categories we have.

So we looked at each one of the categories. We looked at what they would name them, and then we said at the end of the day, is it change for change sake or does it add value and make sense?

And we believe that taking the selective service category is one, and all those did not give us a material advantage to what we have now with the IRR, the Selected Reserve, the Retired Reserve, and categories for Selected Service, et cetera and the drilling Reserve.

So we just came to the conclusion that it did not add any more value, and I thought we had to have a compelling reason for changing. I would be interested in the chief's view on this, but it looked like we understood the categories now. We use them and it was functioning, so we elected to take no action on that.

BURRIS:

So can we tell which is strategic and which is operational now or how do you distinguish?

HALL:

I think you're both, and I think when you're not operational, you're in a strategic, and I think it would be a mistake to try to tell someone because you set in a strategic -- everybody's strategic ready to fight for the country when you go forward and you're operating and so you flow between both categories, and I think most reservists understand that.

The chiefs can see it, but it was pretty simple to me. when I'm forward, mobilized and fighting I'm pretty operational. When I'm at home waiting for the fight, I'm sitting in a strategic way to answer the call to my country.

BURRIS:

That makes a lot of sense to me, Mr. Secretary.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HALL:

Yes, sir. Thank you.

NELSON:

Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Secretary Hall.

I think we will break right now. We'll come right back for the second panel. Senator Graham's coming back as soon as he votes. I'll be back as soon as I do. Thank you.

HALL:

Thank you, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you for your service.

(RECESS)

NELSON:

These votes always seem to get in the way of our other business. Thank you for waiting.

Senator Graham will be back shortly and we'll have some of the others return, as well.

On our second panel we have the chiefs of the reserve components. This includes Lieutenant General Clyde A. Vaughn, director of the Army National Guard; Lieutenant General Harry M. Wyatt, III, director of the Air National Guard; Lieutenant General Jack C. Stultz, commanding general, U.S. Army Reserve Command; Vice Admiral Dirk J. Debbink, chief of Naval Reserve, and commander, Navy Reserve Force; Lieutenant General John W. Bergman, commander, Marine Forces Reserve, and commander, Marine Forces North; Lieutenant General Charles E. Stenner, chief of Air Force Reserve and commander, Air Force Reserve Command.

And we extend a very special welcome to Rear Admiral Daniel R. May, director of Reserve and Training, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve.

It's not often that we have the Coast Guard here, since, as you know, the Coast Guard falls under the secretary of Homeland Defense when it's not operating as a service of the Navy.

But the Coast Guard is a vital part of the total military force and in fact operates under many of the same statutory authorities as the other -- the other services.

And so we welcome you here as well.

We welcome all of you, and we look forward to hearing about the state of the United States Coast Guard Reserve and the other reserve components.

And so gentlemen thank you so much. We'll start with Lieutenant General Vaughn, if

you would please.

VAUGHN:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would ask that my -- my statement be entered into the record. And I'll be real brief because -- since there's seven of us here.

Thanks for the great support of this committee and your leadership. We had an interesting discussion a while ago about operational forces and operational reserves.

This is the strongest Army National Guard of all time. We are indeed an operational force. But I've got to remind everybody, it's all about people on the bottom end. You've got to have all the people, get them all trained in -- racked and stacked in the right formations, and then you've got to have the equipment and full-time support that supports that. That's an operational reserve.

And if the nation asks it to do something or the state asks it to do something, that it can go do it. You just throw the money you want to for training to it, but you don't have to reorganize and cross- level and do all this stuff that we had to do some time back.

So I want to thank you for everything.

As you know we're over our end-strength right now. We have every plan to bring it back down to an authorized level. We don't have the resources to pay for this. But I assure you that we're going to grow readiness. We've got a plan to do that at the same time that we lower end-strength back down.

I look forward to your questions. Thanks for your leadership, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you, General.

General Wyatt?

WYATT:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honor and privilege to be here before you and the committee today, and thanks again for all the hard work the committee has done for your Air National Guard.

I'm privileged to be in the chamber this afternoon with the senior enlisted advisor of the Air National Guard, the Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sergeant Dick Smith from Ohio (inaudible) backing me up here, responsible as I am for the over 94,000 enlisted members of the Air National Guard.

As we meet today, Mr. Chairman, your Air National Guard is protecting our skies over the United States of American at 16 of 18 Air Sovereignty Alert Sites. They're ready to respond to disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes and fires, and currently responding to floods in North Dakota and Minnesota, and snow storms in Montana.

We do all this while at the same time volunteering at unprecedented rates to support the worldwide contingencies. And we cannot forget the backbone of our force, our traditional Guard members, who are providing not only day-to-day AEF rotation capabilities but that critical search capability for our Air Force that makes the Guard such a vital component of the entire Air Force.

In the personnel domain, talking about four major themes today, and then I'll pass the mike. Our primary priority this year is targeted and precision recruiting.

As you're aware, we are over our end-strength for the first time since 2002. We will be focusing our recruiting efforts on getting the right folks in the right place and doing the right jobs. Incentives and bonuses are key to that.

And we also seek to leverage the inherent ANG efficiencies to take on additional Air Force missions as appropriate when asked by the United States Air Force and when resourced by the Air Force.

And we attempt to maximize the use of association, the association constructs where we act with the active duty Air Force Reserve brothers and sisters in forming these new constructs, and look to community basing to better support the Air Force mission.

Thank you very much. It's an honor and privilege to be here, and look forward to your questions, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you, General.

General Stultz?

STULTZ:

Mr. Chairman, Senator Burris, and others, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you and to represent the over 204,000 Army Reserve soldiers who are serving this nation.

Thank you for what you've done, for you and for the staffers there, for all the support you've given us for our soldiers; the things that we talked about in the previous -- with Secretary Hall, some of the TRICARE, some of the retirement, some of the other benefits and all that we're able to take back to those soldiers and say, "Thank you for what you're doing for this nation. This is what Congress is doing for you."

Today I can report to you that your Army Reserve is in excellent shape. We're at 204,000 plus. That's up 7,000 this fiscal year, on top of 7,000 last year. We're growing at a tremendous pace. So recruiting is good. Retention is good.

The theme that we're using in the statement that I submitted for the record is a positive investment for America. The Army Reserve is giving this nation a great return on investment. The dollars that we're given in our budget are used wisely, and we're returning back to America, not only in terms of the military capability but the civilian capability.

I brought with me today -- since 2009 is the year of the NCO for the army -- three great NCOs that I've asked just to stand up just to be recognized. And I use them as an example of when I talk about a return on investment.

Sergeant Jason Ford that you see in front of you, he's a drill sergeant in the Army Reserve. When he is on duty with the Army Reserve, he's training soldiers, not Army Reserve soldiers, active duty soldiers, at our basic training centers like Fort Leonard Wood.

He also trained Iraqi soldiers for a year in Iraq working under General Petraeus over there with the MNSTC-I mission, where he was wounded while on a combat patrol leading 25 Iraqi soldiers by himself; and received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

Back here in America, in Boston, Massachusetts, he's a law enforcement officer. So he comes back and continues to serve in uniform this nation both in Reserve status and as a civilian.

I also have Sergeant Henry Farr (ph) who was over there deployed -- and his son while over there was also deployed -- with 32 Stryker from Fort Lewis. Wounded in action while he was there, but Sergeant Farr (ph) could not get to his son but instead said, "Continue the mission. I've got a mission over here with my unit."

Sergeant Larry Lamonde (ph), a first sergeant over there for a unit that was providing combat patrols, hit by an IED while over there leading the unit -- but continued the mission.

All these gentlemen served their country proudly in uniform but they come back and serve in civilian capacities or working for the government back here.

So we do have a positive return on investment because we give back not only in defense, we give back in the civilian community. So thanks for your support. For all the staffers there, thank you for what you've done for us.

I look forward to your questions, sir. Thank you.

NELSON:

Thank you, General.

And thank you all. Let's give them a round of applause.

(UNKNOWN)

Absolutely.

(APPLAUSE)

NELSON:

General Debbink?

DEBBINK:

Chairman Nelson, Senator Burris, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee this afternoon.

This is my first opportunity to appear before this committee, and I want to begin by thanking you for your terrific support for the 67,217 Navy Reserve sailors and their families that make up your Navy Reserve component.

This afternoon as I testify, Navy Reserve sailors are of course operating in every corner of the world. And you'll see these sailors in the news but you won't see a caption that reads "Reserve" because we are part of Navy's total force and we operate that way around the world.

From certifying strike groups before they deploy overseas to our sailors and naval special warfare groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the world, our sailors truly are making a significant contribution across the full spectrum of both naval and joint operations.

Following a strength reduction of nearly 25 percent since 2003, a central focus of our manpower strategy now is the establishment of a true continuum of service culture.

This offers our sailors the opportunity to truly be sailors for life, providing that life/work balance that accommodates individual circumstances while at the same time sustaining the inventory of skilled and experienced professionals that we need to fill our total force commitments.

I believe that we have proven ourselves to be a ready, responsive, and very adaptable operational force while maintaining the strategic depth that Secretary Hall talked about earlier today.

This is a very important and, I think, very meaningful time for any one of us to be serving in our nation's defense, and I would assert particularly so as a reservist.

So I thank you for your continued support. And we look forward to answering your questions, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you.

General Bergman?

BERGMAN:

Good afternoon, Senator Nelson, Senator Burris. It's an honor to be here. Thank you. Thank you for all the support you've given your Marine Corps Reserve because without it we wouldn't be the ready and relevant fighting force that we are today.

We heard the term "operational reserves" put out a little bit earlier. No matter what you call it, operational reserve, strategic reserve, all I know is that our Marines and our sailors who are attached to us and their families and their employers are standing up and continuing to stand up to sustain the level of operations worldwide that the Marine Corps Reserves is involved in.

As we contemplated what do we call this deployable reserve, we called it an operational reserve and put it into what we call a force generation model, which drives us toward the most important word that I think we can use here for our preparation of forces, which is "predictability."

When you let someone know in advance, well in advance, what they're going to be doing, where they're going to be going so the employers, the families and everybody know what the mission is, know what the time frame is, we have found that it has helped us minimize the amount of cross-leveling that has occurred amongst our units.

So we are very, very deep into the maturation of the force generation model that will allow us in that five-year dwell time to trying to meet the one to five criteria for the reserve component. To man, equip, train, and get our units ready to go and the important -- of course, all that is tied to budgeting.

If we get this right, we will provide not only a ready and relevant force, but a force that was done with a relatively wise use of all the dollars available. Suggest to you there is nothing more adaptable than a Marine in the fight. And as we've been adapting to growing the Marine Corps to 202,000 here over the past few years -- we are two years ahead of schedule -- now it will allow us to refocus some of our manpower planning and policies to shape this operational reserve and our (inaudible) so that we're ready to go for the long term.

I look forward to your questions, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you, General.

BURRIS:

Thank you, General.

NELSON:

General Stenner?

STENNER:

Chairman Nelson, senators, I truly appreciate being here today as the chief of the Air Force Reserve. And I'm also honored to have with me Master Sergeant Troy McIntosh who is my command chief master sergeant and the highest ranking enlisted member of our MagCom (ph); and takes great pride in doing the job that he's doing and taking care -- helping me take care of that enlisted force, which truly is that backbone of our Air Force and our Air Force Reserves.

So, Troy, thank you very much for what you've done.

And thank you all here for what you all have done as well for our Air Force and our Air Force Reserve.

And I say that as a proud member of a three component Air Force. The Air Force Reserve is a part of how we do business on a daily basis. We are funded -- and we appreciate that -- to a tier one level so that our forces are prepared and ready to go 72-hours notice. And we are interchangeable and deploy as such with all of our Air National Guard partners and our active duty partners as well.

That, in my mind, is the most efficient way to do business, and continuing to do business that way as a strategic reserve that we leverage to do that operational force to me makes great sense for the nation.

And the 14 percent of the manpower that we have is in Air Force Reserve for about 5 percent of the budget again remains a very effective and efficient way to deliver that capability to the war- fighter and to the combatant commander.

That reservist that we're talking about is in fact the most precious commodity that we have. That in fact is an individual who has that civilian job, who also has that employer to be concerned with, as we are as well. And they are just as much a part of delivering that capability that we are doing around the world with their support for our citizen airmen that are out there doing the job in the military fashion as well as making sure that the families

are taken care of along the way.

So that reserve triad is very precious I know not only to the Air Force Reserve or the Guard, but all of our components sitting right here at this table.

Finally we've got -- we've got brand new missionaries that we're out there growing. And on behalf of the 67,400 Air Force reservists, we are growing to deliver that capability in unmanned aerial systems, intelligence surveillance, recognizance, the cyberspace arena that we are all growing into, that will be not only the force of today but the force of tomorrow.

So I'm a proud commander in chief of the Air Force Reserve, and look forward to your questions.

NELSON:

Admiral May?

MAY:

Chairman Nelson, Senator Hagan, Senator Burris. It's an honor and pleasure to be here this afternoon representing the Coast Guard Reserve, and I want to especially thank you for that warm welcome.

And here with me this afternoon is my deputy, Captain Andrea Contrata (ph) and also Master Chief Jeff Smith, the Reserve force's master chief.

And first of all, I'd really like to thank you and Senator Graham for your commitment and for tackling the tough issues that face our military personnel and all the progress that you've made in supporting our military men and women.

The Coast Guard is one of our five armed forces. It has a long history, a distinguished history in service to our home both here and abroad as a military, maritime and multi-mission service -- always ready for all threats and all hazards.

And because of this mix of military and civil law enforcement authorities, the Coast Guard is really uniquely positioned to serve as a lead federal agency for our maritime homeland security while also acting as a supporting agency to the Department of Defense.

In fact, over 80 percent of our 8,100 Selected Reserve force is directly assigned to our

Coast Guard Shore Units. The remainder of our force is spread out and dedicated to supporting defense ops.

These forces are assigned to our eight individual port security units which are staffed by reservists fulltime and as well as support personnel. Currently today PSU 311 is serving in theater.

The integration of our active and reserve components began in the 1990s and enables us to respond quickly when and where operational reserve forces are needed. It's aided in part also by the unique authority held by the Homeland Security secretary by using Title 14 of the U.S. Code. Under Title 14 the secretary may recall Coast Guard Reservists for up to 30 days at a time for domestic continuances including natural and manmade disasters as well as any terrorist attacks.

This unique authority helped facilitate a rapid response for the Coast Guard in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita where approximately 700 mobilized Coast Guard reservists performed nearly 20,000 person days in support of our rescue and recover operations in the Gulf Region.

Now after the tragic event of September 11th and in the wake of our largest mobilization, nearly 50 percent of our reserve force was mobilized and this continues today where we have nearly 700 Coast Guard reservists on active duty.

They are actively participating in a number of missions across the entire Coast Guard. We thank you for, again, for the commission for all that they've done. The Coast Guard has been an active participant in the Commission on the Guard and Reserve and as you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, many of those recommendations and any laws that may come from them will apply to the Coast Guard as one of our military services.

So, thank you again. It's an honor to be here on behalf of the Coast Guard men and women. I look forward to any questions you may have.

NELSON:

Thank you very much, Admiral. General Vaughan, General Stultz, and to the members of the panel, a couple of years ago during the Christmas holidays, 48 members of the 110th Medical Battalion based in Lincoln, Nebraska found themselves stranded at Fort Lewis, Washington when training was suspended and the base was shut down for the holidays.

Now the military rules prohibited using funds to pay for their travel back to Nebraska

until training resumed. In a joint explanatory statement that accompanied the 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, we urged the services to be mindful of training suspensions and minimal staffing periods when devising training schedules for the reserve components.

I drafted legislation, which Senator Graham and I will soon introduce, that will correct this deficiency and would authorize travel if a reserve or guard member is more than 300 miles from home and is placed on leave for five days or more because of training suspensions or staffing issues.

Now, it's our understanding that this is not a unique experience among guardsmen and reservists. Because of the lack of planning on the part of the military unit, service members are sent away from home, in some cases, thousands of miles for training missions, and then the training is suddenly suspended.

In these cases, isn't it the military's responsibility to either plan appropriately and not to waste the time of our service members or unnecessarily keep them away from their families or, if the military doesn't plan, should we pay to send them home?

Let me say that we got those members home, but we raised money from private sources in order to do it, which means that there were a number generous folks who helped do it, but it isn't necessarily the responsibility of the private citizen to pay for that public cause.

So my question is what are your policies for assigning training duty during the holiday season, especially as most posts go to reduced manning and suspend training during that period?

We'll start with you, General Vaughn.

VAUGHN:

Senator Nelson, a great issue, inflammatory issue. We're 100 percent on your side. You know, we went through this thing for several years, dating all the way back to the 39th Infantry Brigade and Wal-Mart and a couple of other folks paid for that, and we've got no business passing that on.

And we made our concerns known, and I will tell you that Jack Stultz and I don't have anything to do with scheduling, you know, when they mobilize and report to the training centers.

It's absolutely something that we needed the kind of emotion and fervor on behind it to

get that straightened out. This year, our big formations, everything is after the holiday period.

Now, that's not to say there might not be something in there some place that we don't know anything about, but the other piece of that is that we ought to pay for them coming back home, so we agree -- the Army National Guard agrees 100 percent with your line of reasoning on this.

STULTZ:

Yes, sir, and I'll echo what Clyde said. Sir, 1990, Desert Storm, I reported with my unit, Ft. Eustis, Virginia in November right after Thanksgiving. Now, I deployed with an advanced party into Saudi Arabia ahead of them, but the rest of my unit sat at Ft. Eustis, during the Christmas holidays, and I saw what it did to morale. And I said this is crazy that we've got soldiers sitting around.

The past three years, as I traveled around Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Horn of Africa, whatever, and I talked to soldiers about what makes you feel good and what do you not feel good about, one of the number one subjects they said is wasted time. I sat at a mobilization station and did nothing. And it was wasted time. I could have been with my family.

It's a morale issue. It's a morale issue for holidays. It's a morale issue any time where we have them sitting in a mobilization station and there's nothing going on. And so we have made the commitment to, wherever possible, stop that from happening. As Clyde said, look at the training and say, hey, listen, if you're not going to be there for training, my soldiers aren't going to be there.

Working together for Forces Command at First Army, we are now much better than we used to be of laying out -- we don't do like we used to, where used to be a pre-MOB plan which I had responsibility for, but once they got mobilized, I handed to them to Forces Command and they took over and I lost control.

Now, we have one training plan and we say this is all we're going to do in the pre-mobilization time period and this is what we're going to do in the post-mobilization time period, and we're going to make sure that every day they're at a MOB station they're occupied with some valuable training or either they're deployed.

In the past two years, we've cut that time down, from the time at a MOB station, from 90 days down to 40 days. Our target is 30 days. A unit doesn't need be in a MOB station longer than 30 days and they can get gone.

And so, to that point, we said, listen, if you're not going to be there, we're not going to be there. If we are there and they suspend training, I agree whole-heartedly. We ought to send a soldier home for the holidays. It's a morale issue.

NELSON:

Thank you. Would anyone else like to make any comments? I think they said it very well, but if there are any other comments, we'd certainly like to accept them.

Appreciate that very much. It is a morale issue and we will seek to have this legislation introduced shortly. I hope this year we'll be able to get it passed and so if those unintended consequences occur in the future, we'll be able to deal with things appropriately.

Thank you.

STULTZ:

Thank you, sir.

NELSON:

One other question here, prior to this hearing, our committee sent out a data call on suicide rates in our Guard and Reserve forces. And we've received the information and we've done some analysis on the numbers, and we thank you for your responses.

The information received, however, did identify what I think are some troubling trends. The Army and Air Force were able to provide complete data for suicide rates, both while reserves are activated and on drill status.

The data you provided consistently showed that the number of suicides that occurred while on drill status was more than those that occurred while deployed. This correlates to the qualitative data we received at the hearing last week, of our committee, which showed that service members tend to exhibit more mental health issues, when they're away from the support structure of the military.

Obviously, your quantitative data proves to us that we need to make certain that our Guard and Reserve forces have access to support structures and medical services even when they're not activated.

In your responses to the data call, some of the services stated that they do not have the authority to investigate the death of members, while the member is in a non-military status.

Now, our Guard and Reserve are an operational force and so they need to be ready at all times to meet the mission requirements. How does each of your services track the suicide of a member who's on drill status?

What mechanisms do you need in place and/or what can we do to help to ensure that you have the capability to track medical records for members while they're on drill status?

I guess why don't we start at this end and work back. Admiral May, this may be a new issue. I don't know how much you've been involved. We did have the other services. We didn't include the Coast Guard, not because we intended to exclude you; we just didn't include you.

MAY:

Yes, sir. Chairman, we've been very fortunate; in the small numbers of Coast Guard men and women that have deployed, we have not suffered any suicides whatsoever, of our Reserve forces, so that's been a blessing for us.

We do keep track of our folks, as they come back, and they typically return to a drilling status. We make sure that they go through a de-MOB process, we monitor their progress. There are certainly programs that are available to them should they need any medical assistance whatsoever.

And then, once they go back to a drilling status, obviously, we have visibility of their health and well-being and, if there's anything that's identified, we immediately get them to any care that they may need.

NELSON:

General?

STENNER:

Mr. Chairman, the data research that we've done was a pretty difficult dig, to go find some of these things, particularly because we don't have access to their civilian medical

records. And where and when these things happen, unless they were filing an insurance claim sometimes, we never knew that there was a cause of death that would have been noted as suicide.

However, the '03 to '08 timeframe, where we did research it, we had 42 completed suicides, if you want to put it that way. None of those had occurred, for the Air Force Reserve anyway, while the member was deployed.

Sixteen of the 42 that we did find had deployed at least once prior to their death. And then of the 13 cases that we did have available for review, we did have one that had deployed prior to, but it wasn't during the deployment that we had the suicide.

Now, regardless, what we really have here is a microcosm of society and some of the realities that we look at. The marital difficulties and those kinds of things played as well, so actually pinning down what actually caused that individual to do what they did will be a difficult situation.

But we are very, very cognizant of the fact that we need to be trained and ready and have those suicide prevention kinds of things going on that our folks watch each other, they understand each other.

And we do have those Yellow Ribbon and the re-integration efforts to help us get more eyes on and, more completely, we're going to put some folks into place, both at the command level and regionally, to track the incidents and to keep track of the folks who have these issues.

It will be something that we have as a high priority for quite some time, to ensure that our folks are taken care of.

NELSON:

I realize it's a lot easier, in terms of tracking, when somebody's activated or somebody's home and is active and on active duty, but it also occurs when they're not. And I think that while some might think that there would be a greater opportunity for someone to commit suicide while deployed, it apparently is not the case.

And we understand some of the reasons are the breakdown of romantic or marital relationship or economic difficulties. And we also are aware that sometimes the breakdown in the romantic or the marital difficult and/or the economic circumstances might be affected because of the deployment or the number of deployments that create separation. So we still think it's important to track it the best way that we possibly can.

STENNER:

Yes, sir, and we agree and we're going to keep on doing what we're doing.

NELSON:

General Bergman?

BERGMAN:

Yes, sir. While absolutely we agree that we need to track it, currently in the Marine Corps Reserve we do not have the database available to do that.

However, because we're about an 80 to 85 percent unit-based force, we have the ability to contact people who don't show up for drill, just like you would contact someone who didn't necessary show up for school, saying what's going on, are you sick type of thing.

We have a little bit of an advantage, as we focus our efforts in that direction. The challenge comes, when you have a very small percentage of young -- usually new marines, obligors, who decide maybe that the decision to become a marine wasn't part of their life's plan and, now, they just quit coming to drill and we deal with that on a daily basis.

And sometimes it might be six, eight, ten or longer months, before we can get good location and data on them, on their whereabouts.

So we recognize the need and we will do everything we can to ensure that we get everybody on the roster.

NELSON:

Thank you. Admiral?

DEBBINK:

Chairman Nelson, although not required under any instructions to do so, we've been actually tracking any Navy reservist who committed suicide. Since July of last year, I'm

sad to report that we had four such suicides that occurred not on active duty, not in a drilling status.

But as General Bergman has just said, we, too, have a unit structure, and when someone doesn't show up for drill or work or whatever, you know, you know you're missing somebody. So we are changing the instructions now to make sure that we include all sailors, active component, reserve component, no matter what status they're in.

I'd also like to report that we had a couple of good news stories and that is, with the money that comes with the Yellow Ribbon Re- Integration Program, we've stood up our Returning Warrior Workshops and we've also stood up a psychological health outreach coordinators.

You know, in one of our Returning Warrior Workshops, somebody with a suicide ideation was identified by another sailor and referred and referred and we believe, you know, prevented that from happening.

Additionally, we had a psychological health outreach coordinator and they were visiting in NOSC, Navy Operation Support Center, once and identified another sailor and I'm proud to say both of those sailors are alive yet today. So thank you for your support of that, it's a very important program.

NELSON:

Thank you.

General Stultz?

STULTZ:

Yes, sir. We, in the Army, take suicides very, very seriously. We have, in the Army Reserve, been tracking all suicides, whether they're on or off of active duty or drilling status, because any soldier I lose is a loss, whether he was in an active or non- drilling status.

As you probably know, the Army's in the midst of a stand-down, where we have taken a stand-down approach of doing suicide prevention training across the force. We're doing that throughout the Army Reserve.

The challenge we've got is what you just mentioned. I see my soldiers two days out of

the month, the other 28 days out of the month, they're with their families. Now, what we're trying to train is awareness, what to look for, the signs that somebody's having problems, reduce the stigma, that it's OK to ask for help, and what are the resources to reach out to?

We're doing a good job training the soldiers; we've got to train the families because they're the ones that are with that soldier the other 28 days that we don't see them. Now, what we've seen -- we do a psychological autopsy on every suicide that we have and try to dig in as much as possible to try to understand and see is there anything we could have done different, is there anything we could have done to prevent it.

As Dirk just mentioned, during the training that we've been conducting, we've already had several cases where individuals stepped up and said I need help. We had one case where a soldier took an overdose of pills, but then changed -- you know, realized, after he'd taken the overdose of pills, "I don't have to do this," and called one of his other buddies and said "I need help. I just did this." And we were able to save him.

But we've also had a couple of incidents where soldiers took their own lives after leaving a weekend drill or a period like that. And in doing the psychological autopsy, what we find out is, we are a support structure to them. They take great pride in being in the Army Reserve. They feel like we care. When I'm with my unit they care about me, they take care of me, but when I go back home, there's nothing there.

And that's when it's happened. And so we've got to really reach out and figure out how do we get in touch and stay in touch to provide that support network that other 28 days of the month that we're not with that soldier, and to be able to educate the families and the support structure around them. What to do when something occurs, when something's not right.

We can take care of them the two days we have them. It's the other 28 days, and as has been reported, the majority of our suicides occur off duty. It's not related to a deployment. It's not related to the Army in specific, it's something that's going on in their life elsewhere that's failing, and we just don't know about it.

NELSON:

General Wyatt?

WYATT:

Mr. Chairman, the Air National Guard has been tracking suicide data actively since

September of '04, and we had 46 completed suicides from September of '04 through December of '08.

AUDIO GAP ENDS

To lend substance to your observation that most of these take place outside of the supervision of the military, none of our suicides have occurred while the members have been deployed. Of the 46 members who have had a suicide history, 41 percent have had a history of deployment, while 59 percent had no history of deployment.

Of the ones who have had a deployment history, 32 percent had one deployment, 9 percent, two deployments, and 0 percent had more than two deployments. We share the same concerns that the Air Force Reserve does in the inability, because of resourcing and legal authorities, to investigate deaths that occur when a member is not on status.

But like the Army Reserve, we take each one seriously and do our best to track, through our contacts with the local law enforcement, to ascertain the cause of death. But just to lend support to your observation, most of our problems seem to occur when the member is not under our command and control.

NELSON:

OK.

General Vaughn?

VAUGHN:

Mr. Chairman, I would echo what General Stultz and General Wyatt have had to say. We have tracked them very closely. You know, we're probably as tight-knit an organization as there can be. Same thing, most of them, the great bulk of them, are not on active duty. They occur back here on this side.

This is a significant issue for the Army National Guard right now. We've averaged, over the last few years -- you've got the data -- about 60, you know, in both statuses. And at the rate we're going, we could -- if we hold with the same rate, we may see as many as 90, you know, based on what's happened so far.

Our adjutants general are all over this. I get good, accurate reporting, you know, whether they're on duty or not. It comes in. We assign it properly. We also, as you well

know, it's pending, right up until you get a coroner's report.

Now, we have asked our JAG, you know, for our commanders to be able to a 15-6 (ph) investigation, a cursory look at this to say, yes, this is what it is, because we need the other pieces of this. We are into it. We are on the Army plan. Jack and I are both right there with Pete Chiarelli in -- and the better part of that, the adjutants general have really got this thing in their sights.

We'll do all we can, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you.

Senator Graham?

GRAHAM:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to have to run again. I apologize. It's a budget markup. This is one of those days where everybody meets at the same time.

General Vaughn, about the dental readiness, are these numbers right -- 52 percent? And first quarter FY 2009, more than half the Army Guard and Reserves, 52 percent were reported as non-deployable due to the class 3 or class 4 dental readiness status. Is that correct?

VAUGHN:

Senator, that's probably correct because of the screening mechanism. In other words, you know how this goes. If you go down-range you get screened. You come back, already, and you can't drill for 36 to 90, you're getting pretty close to being out-of-sorts already. OK?

Now, what is a big deal, is that when we started into the mobilization stations and we were running about 50 percent or 60 percent dental readiness. Today we're running at 90 percent to 92 percent. We have made overwhelming progress.

Now, the screening piece, you know, we've got to get better on the screening piece, but just because they're not screened out and they're out of tolerance, you know, on the

screening, doesn't mean they're not deployable, and that's what we're finding.

GRAHAM:

I got you. I got you.

Is there anything we can do to help you there in resources or...

VAUGHN:

Yes, we'll check and see what plays out resource-wise...

GRAHAM:

Yes. I mean if there's any way we can help...

VAUGHN:

...pretty quick, and I think that, you know, everybody here is pretty candid. We're going to come up and tell you, and you've helped a great deal, and let us ponder that just a little bit, and we'll get something to you.

GRAHAM:

Sure. Outstanding. One last question, this idea of the 20- to 30-year retention, you know, that military Guard, reservist who has hit 20, usually units, particularly in the Guard, people stay as long as they can.

But I've seen, just anecdotally, from, you know, being a reservist myself and being around the Guard a lot, that at 20, they're pretty worn out and they're punching out. Is that generally a problem?

Let's start with the Coast Guard and work our way backward.

MAY:

Senator Graham, we actually are blessed in that folks want to stay. In fact, I had a Coast Guard reservist who wanted to stay beyond 60. Sixty is usually the retirement date.

GRAHAM:

But you're not losing -- your numbers haven't declined?

MAY:

No, sir.

GRAHAM:

What about the Air Force?

WYATT:

No, sir. They want to stay.

GRAHAM:

OK. The Marines?

BERGMAN:

They want to stay, sir.

GRAHAM:

OK. The Navy?

DEBBINK:

Yes, sir, they're staying.

GRAHAM:

OK.

VAUGHN:

No, sir. It's an issue for us.

GRAHAM:

OK. Well, the Army's taking the brunt of this -- the Army and the Marine Corps.

VAUGHN:

Yes, sir.

Yes, and you know, if you go back to Vietnam, we lost the NCO corps in Vietnam. If you talk to a lot of the commanders that were there during that timeframe, because one deployment got it, the second deployment -- by about the third deployment, the family and everybody else says you got your 20 in and you can get out. And the active Army lost their NCO Corps. It took them 10 years to rebuild it.

I'm concerned we're doing the same thing in the Reserve.

GRAHAM:

Yes, I am, too.

VAUGHN:

Right now, I'm short...

GRAHAM:

But the Marines, you're OK.

BERGMAN:

At the senior levels, where we, sir, have room to go and grow, and we've identified this, they're not even near the 20-year level. It's how do we take those corporals and sergeants in the Reserve component and get them over that hump to make them to want them to become E-6s and then populate that senior and mid-level.

GRAHAM:

Yes, yes, got you. OK. Well, so it is a problem in the Army. So I want to get with Senator Nelson and find a way to incentivize people to stay past 20.

Air Force again, not a problem, right?

STENNER:

No, sir.

GRAHAM:

OK. Well, thank you.

General Vaughn, do you agree with that? We need to get ahead of this in the Army?

VAUGHN:

I agree with what Jack says, but it's mid-level stuff. If they've made the commitment as a colonel, a master sergeant and whatnot, you know, five, six and sevens that have been kind of stagnating a little bit, and you know what they're after is the early retirement piece -- the piece that may get them to, you know, when you come with, you know, the 90-day and one year perk, all of a sudden, we see people's eyes go wide open.

GRAHAM:

What I've been thinking about doing is in certain selected areas, critical need areas, if

you'll stay to 22 you can retire, maybe, you know, at 59, and just walk your way down to 55, as an incentive to stay on.

Well, thank you all for your service. All I can tell you is that this war has been an incredibly difficult challenge for the active duty component. For the Guard and Reserve, it has been a phenomenal challenge. The communities have stood up and stepped up. The employers are the unsung heroes of this war, as far as I'm concerned, along with the Guard and Reserve families.

And we're going to win this thing, and you could not possibly fight this war without the Guard and Reserve, and Mr. Chairman, we talked about this yesterday. From a national point of view, we have the most war-ready, combat-ready Guard and Reserve in the history of the nation, and they're being well-led. So, God bless.

(UNKNOWN)

Thank you, sir.

NELSON:

Thank you, Senator.

When it comes to retaining and incentivizing that group, there are a lot of good reasons to do it, not the least of which is those are very expensively trained and prepared personnel. And when we lose them prematurely, we lose part of the investment, if not all of the investment that we've made beyond what we've received in the way of service.

So we obviously have every reason in the world to want to retain the members at that level if we possibly can. So we will look for ways to be able -- and before we drop them in, we'll run them by you because we want to make sure that the incentives do, in fact, make sense.

When we worked on the new GI bill, the first effort at it was comparable to the draft military. And that was taking care of people who were leaving. So the first effort at the GI bill, I looked it and I said, "Now we're going to create incentives for people to leave, as opposed for incentives for people to stay."

And I think that's clearly what we want to do here -- make certain that we know exactly what it is that we'll get from any kind of solution we come up with.

Senator Burris, any other questions?

BURRIS:

Mr. Chairman, thank you. I do have one question.

And to all the commanders, mine deal with the family question, in particular, the requirement for supporting the family members of our deployed or our frequently deployed Reserve's components of the Coast Guard, the Army, the sailors, the Marines and the airmen. If not properly prepared and supported, the family members' negative experience are transferred to the service members who are thousands of miles away.

So my question is, under this RAND study, which addresses the deployment experiences of the Guard and Reserve found that family readiness was a critical aspect of preparing a service member for active duty service. Also in the RAND study, emotional and mental problems were mentioned most frequently. Thirty-nine percent of the spouses and 26 percent of service members mentioned such problems.

So commanders, can you each tell us what steps are we taking to deal with the deployment, you know, related to the problems with the family members that are experiencing the absenteeism and the constant uncertainty in the deployments?

So, how do we want to start? Coast Guard to start?

MAY:

Yes, sir.

BURRIS:

OK.

MAY:

Sir, I think General Stultz mentioned this earlier, but absolutely what we can do for the families of our reservists is absolutely the best thing we can do to ensure their wellness, and that they're ready to fight and be as ready as they can for us.

What we have done, we've got several programs that are in place to support the families of the members, either while they're deployed or when they come back. We have a work-life program. We also have a EAP program that is available for members and their families, should they need that.

The other thing we're doing -- and this is on behalf of Admiral Debbink and the U.S. Navy -- they have reached out to the Coast Guard and offered us to participate in their reintegration program. And we're going to sign an MOA with the Navy that will allow Coast Guard men and women to take advantage of that great program that they're offering for members that have deployed and come back.

So we're with you, sir, and we're going to do everything we can to take care of our families.

BURRIS:

Thank you.

Yes, sir?

STENNER:

I will echo those sentiments. I'll tell you one of the biggest things we've done, sir, is the predictability that comes with starting well ahead of time and announcing when it is these folks will be leaving. That gives us plenty of time, six months is the secretary of defense's redline right now for advising soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines when they're going to be called up to go.

And that gives us and our family readiness shops six months prior time to get everybody ready, to let them know what it is that they have as far as their benefits, to get them prepared with the pieces of paper that they would need in the case of wills and child care.

And then our family readiness shop takes up and we use our spouses, as well. We have key spouse programs, Phoenix Spouse programs, Military OneSource -- all of the kinds of things that are available to them, and we prep all those families prior to the deployment of the member.

And then we do, as was said by Admiral May, keep up with them when they come home and make sure that the things that have happened along with way that can uproot

and upset families are accommodated and taken care of, and we get them in touch with the right agencies. And the Yellow Ribbon program, again, becomes a very useful tool to keep those families engaged.

BURRIS:

How about the Marines, sir?

BERGMAN:

Yes, sir. First of all, great question. Thank you. I think it's important to note that whether you're active or reserve in any service -- but I'll speak about the Marine Corps here -- when we deploy a Reserve Marine, we take that Marine from their home, wherever their home is in this country, and their family stays most of the time, in that comfort zone of where they grew up, where they're living. So they have a natural support network.

Whereas an active component Marine might have been from Chicago, and gotten stationed in Camp Lejeune and that Marine deploys and the family decides to go back to Rolling Meadows or Naperville or somewhere to sit out that seven-month deployment, we have a different set of metrics for support of the families, whether it be active or reserve.

The good news is is that when General Conway became commandant, one of his first statements is "I'm going to put the family readiness programs, family support programs on a wartime footing." He felt there was room to grow.

A myriad of changes, the largest two of which are full-time family readiness officers hired on the payroll of the Marine Corps, both active and reserve units down to the battalion level, that this is their full-time job.

Second to that, once you've got the people in place, now you add the communication systems. Because largely, now getting back to the reserve component, what our families need if they're sitting in Chicago, they want to know what's going on with their Marine. They want to know where they are.

So as that Marine is activated and joins that gaining force command, it could be a reserve command it could be an active command, the ability to track where they are, because we all want to know where they are, how they're doing.

So thanks to General Conway's efforts, we have made great strides in the last couple of years in coupling together the reserve and active needs through the full-time family

readiness program

BURRIS:

Thank you.

How about the Navy? Do they get on those ships for those six- month tours and the family don't know where they are?

DEBBINK:

Yes, sir, Senator Burris. I think, you know, one of the keys to all of this is, of course we all recognize that we recruit a service member and we retain a family. You've heard that saying before.

BURRIS:

Absolutely.

DEBBINK:

And so we need to continuously communicate with those family members and we look for ways to doing that, whether they're deployed, whether they're back here at home, or whether they're out on the ship.

There are things like family days. We have a very robust ombudsman program with all of our units. Our Navy operational support centers are located throughout the country, all know to stay in touch with these family members while the members are deployed.

We've also got the program you've heard about before, Returning Warrior workshops where we incorporate the family member when they come back, so you're communicating with them before they leave and after they come back as well.

And Military OneSource is a fantastic thing we all have available to us that's being funded of course by the Department of Defense. Just almost anything you could ask for, a family member can get at via Military OneSource.

And finally, I do believe the most important thing we can do for family members is

ensure each and every one of our service members has real and meaningful work to do, so when they're deployed, they're gone, they're out doing our work, our nation's work.

They call back home, they e-mail back home and they maybe can't tell you what they're doing but they can say, "Hey, I'm making a huge difference." And as long as that's the case, family members have been very, very supportive, sir.

BURRIS:

Thank you.

General, how about the Army?

VAUGHN:

Yes sir. Family readiness, family support is critical for us. As Dirk mentioned, if we don't retain the family we don't retain the soldier. And we've seen what the operational tempo will do in terms of -- I've been there on a battlefield with a soldier that can't focus because he's got family problems back home. He becomes a liability, a liability not only to himself, but to his buddies.

We have put, as Jack Bergman said, a lot of structure into the Army Reserve. We have hired family readiness support assistants -- full-time people -- because we said we can't depend on volunteers. The volunteers are burning out. They're getting tired.

So we've put full-time structure in there, trying to get it down to the battalion level. We're not there yet. We've reorganized our structure on our family readiness programs. It's become a command priority and it's become a command measurement also because, you know, in readiness we measure unit readiness by personal readiness, by equipment readiness, by training readiness. We never measured family readiness. And we say we've got to put that in the equation because the unit's not ready if the family's not ready.

The last thing I would say is as we've developed what we call the Army force generation cycle, the five-year rotation where we bring a unit back from theater, reset the unit and get it into training year one, two, three and then deploy it.

That family readiness becomes part of that cycle, too, because when you come home, you've got to reset that family readiness group and then you've got to rebuild them, and then you've got to prepare them so that when the unit gets ready to deploy, we can check the block and say the family readiness group is ready, too, and all the families are taken

care of.

The last thing I'll mention because it is a particular issue for me, we can't forget about the kids, the stress on the kids. We don't know what's going through their mind. My wife Laura and I were down at a kid's camp, these Operation Purple camps we have for kids of deployed soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen. Great camps.

We were down in one in Fort Bragg a couple of years ago talking to the counselor. And he said, "You never know what's on their mind." We're sitting there with two young kids around the campfire and one's talking about when his dad comes back and they're going to go fishing and they're going to go whatever. And the other kid looks at him and says, "You mean they come back?" And we don't know what they're thinking and we can't forget about the kids and make sure we're taking care of them also.

BURRIS:

Absolutely.

General, the Air Force?

WYATT:

Yes sir. The Air National Guard has been deploying AEF rotations since about the mid 90's. My particular wing in Oklahoma, for example, first deployed in 1996 and it has deployed either in Operation Northern Watch, Southern Watch, OEF, OIF, nine times.

Granted, the deployments aren't as long, but they are more frequent. We have a few different challenges than perhaps the Army does with different types of deployments. We're seeing also with some of our reach-back capability with some of our Predator operators and some of the people who provide the information processing, that they'll go to work at an Air National Guard base one day, work eight hours, see some things that most Americans don't see and then go home to the wife and kids.

It proposes or it presents a different challenge. The adjutants general tell me that they recognize that there are different challenges with the services and they need to have programs that consider the equities of the services.

But they would also like to integrate and leverage the capabilities of different programs that are provided by our parent services. And to that extent, I think we are in the process of working extremely well with the Army National Guard to lash our two programs up so

that they complement one another.

We could use some help. At least the Air National Guard could and our joint force headquarters manning to help facilitate that. But we have, for example, one program, the Yellow Ribbon program has been mentioned before. Reintegration I think might be a misnomer because I consider it more of an integration, because it's not just after the deployment. It starts actually before -- an outreach program to the families, the member, the kids, to teach them about the programs that are available to them, to handle all the different challenges that they might face, and to facilitate access to those programs that are out there. Strong Bonds marriage seminars is another.

It's getting better. I remember back in the days when we first started deploying, we had one family support person who did all of the work for the entire wing. It was a wait-and-see-what-developed as opposed to what it is today, which is an active outreach program to reach out and touch our families and help them through the process.

BURRIS:

General, do you have any other comments on the Army situation?

VAUGHN:

Senator Burris, I would mirror several of the comments here, a couple of things. One is the Army National Guard by charter manages 325 family assistance centers throughout in the United States. And that's air and Army and Navy and Marines, everybody walks in. That's 2.2 million inquiries.

Now, that just gets at the issues that are out there. I think the most powerful -- one of the most powerful things that have come out of the conflicts that we're in is the power of the family readiness groups. Every unit, every deploying unit has them.

Now therein lays, you know, when you look at the soft spot and what's wrong with our organization. We identified something here and that is the people that aren't served by that are the cross-level soldiers -- the ones that come in there in (inaudible) that the families are way away from those tight-knit communities. So when we looked at that, we said, you know, the way to get at this family readiness problem and the family issue so that we've got families with their arms all the way around everybody and know everybody, is to bring more unit cohesion to our organizations.

And that's why we're all about readiness. We're all about getting our strength as high as

we can and train soldiers and not cross-leveling and getting all of that out of the way, because it actually empowers the family readiness groups because they can get their arms around everybody. So that's what we've done. Thanks for the great question.

BURRIS:

Mr. Chairman, I was out at Walter Reed Hospital last Friday. This is not a Reserve or a National Guard issue, but I was interviewing some of the warriors that were being treated at Walter Reed. And I came into the room of this young warrior from Illinois and he was being discharged. And I asked him, well, "Son, what are you going to do?" And you know what he told me? He said, "Senator, I'm trying to figure out how in the hell I can get back to my unit in Iraq."

I looked at that kid and I almost broke down in tears, because here he was getting out of his bed with a prosthesis telling me he wanted to go back to be with his unit. You guys are training those young men to defend us. God bless you.

(UNKNOWN)

Thank you, Senator.

NELSON:

General Wyatt, it's my understanding that under the auspice of total force integration, the Air Force is now considering transfer of priority missions that align with the traditional Guard construct to the Air National Guard, thus enabling the Air Force to allocate -- reallocate those freed activity duty resources to missions requiring higher full-time manning.

And I support operationalizing the total force. And I want to make sure this is done, but also want to preserve your ability to perform the homeland defense and civil support missions.

Maybe you can give some examples of total force integration missions that have been assigned to the Air National Guard. And in the process of having those reassignments, have you received the necessary resources to see them through so that they don't in some way diminish your other resources?

WYATT:

Thank you, Senator. Great question, and you're right on target. The Air National Guard is working with General Stenner, Air Force Reserve and the Air Force A8 to identify those capabilities that the United States Air Force needs that would be ideal situations for associations.

You're very aware of probably one of the greatest association examples in your crypto linguist unit there in Nebraska. But you're also aware because of that that sometimes we're not properly resourced even though that's a great example of how a guardsman can associate with an active duty member force structure to provide the capability that this country needs.

Each of the three components has strengths that can be leveraged to make us even stronger. We also have some weaknesses that if we can avoid through these associations or at least minimize, we can provide more capability to the country. We're looking at just about every mission that the United States Air Force wants to get into.

We're looking at ways to associate. We're looking at the high ops tempo missions that the Air Force is more suited to take because of their full-time force, but also associating guardsmen in there to provide the surge capability that that particular unit might need.

The Air Force Reserve is doing the same thing. We've got different types of associations that we're looking at, the classic association, which originally started with the Air Force owning the platform and the Reserve component going to the active duty.

But we see active associations now where the force structure is coming the other way. We sometimes get caught up, I think wrongly so, in arguing over who owns the capability, because an active duty component may own the capability that the association should take place on an active duty base.

I think we need to consider things like ability to recruit to that particular mission, the demographics, the type of mission it is, the particular MBS (ph), or the weapon system that we're talking about. And then take a look at the different association constructs and see which one fits a particular situation better.

We're investigating a new construct called an embedded associate that may offer opportunities to take TFI to the next step. And I think you're aware that Secretary Donnelly has encouraged us through his TFI, total force integration, to initially to continue working together. And I'm proud to say that we're partnering up with my good friend Charlie Stenner, Air Force Reserve in the active duty to do exactly that sir.

NELSON:

Are there any examples of what you could do on a total force integration mission where if you had greater end-strength or additional resources that that could be put together?

WYATT:

Yes sir. The demand far exceeds the supply. You know, the Air Force brought its manpower down and is in the process of bringing it back up.

NELSON:

Right.

WYATT:

I think General Stenner is adding 4,000-plus to his end- strength after having taken his force down as a result a few years ago. The adjutants general's counsel to the Guard, to the Air Guard was don't take your manpower down a few years ago, but take your risk in a reduction of our flying-hour program, and we did that.

But if you take a look at the missions that the Air National Guard has already accepted from the United States Air Force and the validated required manpower needed to perform those missions, we are 2,228 positions short of what we need.

That doesn't count the need for Air Guardsmen to populate our joint force headquarters, and it doesn't count all the other missions that the active duty Air Force is asking the Guard and the Reserve to consider associating with them in.

So if the Air Force wants us to do these missions, we'll be happy to do it. Our recruiting vector is going in the direction that would allow us to recruit to those, but we need appropriate resourcing if that's the call that will be made by our senior Air Force and nation's leadership.

NELSON:

Well, I certainly agree with you, and I hope that as these opportunities are there, and if

they do, in fact increase, that everyone will make us aware of the need to add the resources, the end- strength and/or the financial resources to make sure that they happen so we don't end up with a crypto linguist situation where great idea, just not resourced and therefore a missed opportunity.

WYATT:

Well, you're exactly right, sir. At last count, we had 136 total force initiatives that were still pending, working with the active duty and the Reserve. The Air National Guard is involved in 94 of those, so we're extremely interested in participating in TFI.

But when it drives an additional manpower requirement, we would ask to be appropriately resourced if that's the direction the Air Force wants to go.

NELSON:

As you should, and so if you will keep us aware of that, that would be very helpful. We'd be more than willing to assist and to take that into consideration.

To the other witnesses today, have you experienced similar issues with assignments or considerations of additional missions that you might have engaged in if you had had the resources, either the end- strength or the financial resources to be able to do?

Let's see, yours is a little different, Captain May, but are you running into some things like that?

MAY:

Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman, I think we, that's the biggest thing we struggle with each and every day, both on the active duty side of the Coast Guard and on the Reserve side. It's our limited capacity.

If you look at the active duty component, it's about a 41,000 force. The reserve component is about 8,100. So combined, you're looking at a total force of less than 50,000. That's about the size of the New York City Police Department, and we have a worldwide mission. So we're only limited by our capacity. And certainly if there was an opportunity there, we could certainly provide greater service to this nation if we had additional forces, yes, sir.

NELSON:

Well, with the concern we have about port security and other needs to secure our borders, oceanfront property as well as landlocked locations, certainly it makes a lot of sense to be certain we have adequate resources for your missions.

MAY:

Yes, sir.

NELSON:

OK.

General Bergman?

BERGMAN:

The short answer, sir, is no, we haven't seen anything significant, whether it be on the potential addition of missions or the need for manpower. We -- but we must be very mindful of -- and General Conway has discussed this in his vision strategy for 2025 -- of the need for the sustainable Reserve with the skill sets that the Marine Corps requires.

And I would suggest to you that as we deploy worldwide, some of the skill sets resident in the Marine Corps Reserve can only be gotten because these Marines, largely senior Marine Reserves, have acquired a combination of Marine leadership traits and civilian occupation skill sets which provide a very unique and very positive blend for some of the places we go.

NELSON:

Admiral Debbink?

DEBBINK:

Mr. Chairman, we talk, of course, about there being Navy capabilities, and then the

question is how best to source those, either with the active component or the reserve component. And this is where the really hard work is going on.

One example is our Navy expeditionary combat command down at Norfolk which is presently 51 percent reserve components and 49 percent active component. It seems to be working OK right now during the current overseas contingencies, but what about later on? And what about post this period? And what's the right mix? Those are very difficult questions, the answer that we're doing the analytics on right now. And those will drive them to the real solution as to where those capabilities exist, active component or reserve component. So it's hard work, but we're hard at it.

NELSON:

Thank you.

General Stultz?

STULTZ:

I get asked every day by the Army to do more. If you had asked me three years ago when our end-strength was at 20,000 below what we were authorized, we would have probably said we couldn't take on any more.

Today, we're 500 short of what our authorized end-strength are, should be. So we're growing at a great rate. I think there is more we can do, yes, sir. I just came back from a trip to European Command in Stuttgart, Germany, and Africa Command, at their request.

Specifically because they're looking at the same thing we do down at Southern Command, and that is, the security cooperation partnership-type programs where we're doing medical readiness, we're doing engineering missions. We're doing things in Africa already, building schools, building roads, drilling wells -- those kind of things that they say -- within reserve components, Guard and Reserve -- you guys have the civilian skills that blend nicely with this.

And it's not long-term missions. In a lot of cases, it's three months or four months, whatever. Can you do more? Can you take these on because the active force is committed to Afghanistan and Iraq and we can't get any resourcing for these types of exercises. We could do more if we had more to work with.

Likewise, when the Army was given the go-ahead to grow to 547, which was an

increase of 65,000 over 482,000 that they originally had, what we saw happening out there is, kind of everybody felt they had a sort of a blank check.

So a lot of these Army units that were at one time multi-compo, split between Reserve and active, the Army came to us and said, "We're just going to go active pure. We don't need the Reserve anymore because we're growing. And so you go ahead and take your structure and grow something else," which we did. We grew 16,000 additional military police, transportation, engineers, medical structure in the Army Reserve.

Well, now the Army's coming back to us and saying, "Well, just kidding, we really do need you in these multi-compo units." And we said, "But we've already committed the spaces." So if you're going to ask us to fill out these active component units now with multi-compo headquarters, you've got to give us more strength at the end.

So I think there is a lot more we can do. And as I led off with, the return on investment, we are a great return on investment, all of the reserve components. We're only limited by, you know, we're limited in terms of end-strength and capability.

NELSON:

General Vaughn?

VAUGHN:

Sir, you know we take on every mission that's out there. And we don't turn any down, and, you know, it's those we can't see, you know, that really kind of disturb us. We are on track in our search of a great, ready organization.

We need to keep the equipment thing flowing like it is, and get our full-time support piece that you've helped us with, you know, and the appropriate numbers. And it's probably getting there now.

The issue that we have in front us for the Army Guard, and today we stand at 368,000, as you know. It's about 16,000 over the appropriated strength, but about 10,000 over the language that was in the supplemental.

And we don't have the money, and we're going to have to pull back towards that 358,000. But I will tell you this, that it's going to be healthy for us because we have two problems. We have a dinosaur of a Cold War-era relic in the way that we man up our force.

We take so -- we take individuals in that want to be soldiers that are not soldiers, and swear them in at day one. This is 60 years old, the nearest I can see. OK. Now, those soldiers count against our spaces.

On the active side, they only count those folks that are really soldiers. We're going to convert into a system just like the active Army does over the next eight months. I think we're going to get there.

And then, my successor is going to come back and ask for an end- strength increase because we also need an over-strength account to take care of those that are in training, just exactly like the active Army has.

And this will then have you exactly postured, you know, to where when you ask the Guard to do something, you can rest assured you're not going to have to cross-level a bunch of folks to do it. And they're going to go and do it.

So we've just got to keep it on the rails that we're on right now. I think we're going to look at, we're going to have to look at a strength increase at some point in time for this training account, or we're going to have to reduce some force structure to get the readiness we need.

NELSON:

Well, I think it's important that you do that and get into that position because it's easy to predict that we're going to be needing some help along the border, on the southern border, with the drug wars, war nevertheless, not matter what it, what it may consist of.

And it would not be surprising if you were asked to take some role in helping quell the violence along that border in some time, nearly almost certainly it's going to happen soon.

Well, I've asked all of the questions I have, but I may not have asked all of the questions I should have.

So I ask, is there anything I haven't asked you that I should have or anything that we've left out that you'd like to comment on? And I won't be embarrassed for not having asked something I should have, if you can add anything to it. Have I missed anything?

Well, we, as a committee, appreciate very much your involvement. Thank you for being here at this hearing today. There is a great deal of interest in these subjects, and we want, we want to get it right. And we want to make sure that whatever you need, you know, that

there's a place to come and tell us and ask for it.

And we'll work with you to get it accomplished. It's too important not to. May God bless you, may God bless the men and women under your command and all those who wear our uniform all over the world. Thank you very much.

CQ Transcriptions, March 25, 2009

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